

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7910

S E C R E T BANGKOK 17023

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, THA

SUBJ: NEGOTIATIONS ON US FORCE REDUCTIONS

DEPT PASS SECDEF, CINCPAC, USSAG

REF: A. BANGKOK 16579

B. BANGKOK 16835

1. FOLLOWING DISCUSSION BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER SANYA, FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN, AND AMBASSADOR UNGER (REF B) ON SUBJECT OF US MILITARY PRESENCE, DCM MET WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND, ON 30 OCTOBER. DCM REITERATED OUR WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE TALKS IN RESPONSE TO RTG REQUEST BUT STRESSED THAT NOW WAS NOT THE TIME TO GIVE ANY PUBLIC INDICATION TO HANOI THAT WE WERE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING FURTHER REDUCTIONS IN US FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND. REFERRING TO EARLIER DISCUSSIONS WITH KRIANGSAK, DCM SUGGESTED, IF POSSIBLE, THAT MEETINGS BE SMALL, LOW-VISIBILITY AND THAT THERE NOT BE A SPECIFIC PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT EACH SESSION SINCE THIS WOULD RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT EXACTLY WHAT WAS DISCUSSED. TO EXTENT RTG FELT PUBLICITY WAS ESSENTIAL WE WOULD PREFER CONFING OURSELVES TO GENERAL STATEMENT THAT TALKS WERE CONTINUING. KRIANGSAK AGREED AND SAID HE THOUGHT HE COULD HOLD LINE ON THIS FOR A TIME. AS FOLLOW-UP TO THESE DISCUSSIONS, MAJOR GENERAL MELLEN, COMUSMACV AND POMIL COUNSELOR TOGETHER WITH GENERAL O'KEEFE, COMUSSAG MET WITH KRIANGSAK

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ON 31 OCTOBER IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING GENERAL O'KEEFE'S COURTESY CALL ON THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, AIR CHIEF MARSHAL DAWEE.

2. THIS MEETING WAS NOTABLE FOR ITS LACK OF SUBSTANCE.

DESPITE SEVERAL OFFERS BY THE US PARTICIPANTS TO PROVIDE KRIANGSAK MORE EXPLICIT JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CURRENT US FORCE LEVELS, HE SEEMED PREOCCUPIED WITH OTHER MATTERS, PARTICULARLY HELICOPTER ACCIDENT THE PREVIOUS EVENING WHICH SERIOUSLY INJURED SEVERAL CLOSE FRIENDS. KRIANGSAK EXPRESSED PLEASURE THAT THE FREQUENT MEETINGS AMONG THE EMBASSY, MACTHAI, AND HIMSELF COULD BE USED TO CONFIRM PUBLICLY THAT THE RTG-US DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE US PRESENCE IS CONTINUING. KRIANGSAK EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO CITE HIS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH THE EMBASSY AND MACTHAI IN WORKING OUT MUTUAL PROBLEMS AS CONTRIBUTING SUBSTANTIALLY TO SUCH THINGS AS THE LOW INCIDENT RATE AMONG US FORCES IN THAILAND AND THE LACK OF PUBLICITY ON INCIDENTS WHICH DID OCCUR. HE FULLY AGREED THAT SMALL MILITARY GROUP MEETINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF FORCE LEVELS WOULD BE SATISFACTORY FOR THE TIME BEING.

3. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT AT LEAST OUR REGULAR MILITARY AND DEFENSE CONTACTS IN THE INTERIM THAI GOVERNMENT NOW ACCEPT THE DESIRABILITY OF PROCEEDING CAUTIOUSLY FOR THE PRESENT ON NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNING REDUCTION OF US FORCES TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION OF WEAKENING THEIR DETERRENT EFFECT IN THE AREA. CERTAINLY KRIANGSAK, AS THE RTG CHIEF NEGOTIATOR, GIVE EVERY IMPRESSION OF WANTING TO KEEP DISCUSSION IN THE LOWEST POSSIBLE KEY AND IN MILITARY CHANNELS. THIS EXCHANGE CONFIRMS OUR EARLIER ESTIMATE THAT RTG WILL NOT PRESS FOR U.S. MILITARY REDUCTIONS DURING NEXT FEW WEEKS. HOWEVER, THIS GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIVE TO STUDENT AND PUBLIC OPINION WHICH CAN BE EXPECTED TO FOCUS AGAIN ON OUR PRESENCE WHEN CURRENT HONEYMOON ENDS.
UNGER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECDEF CINCPAC AND USSAG.

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